Community Accountability Working Document

Principles/Concerns/Strategies/Models

March 5, 2003

NOTE: These ideas have been generated from various communities involved with INCITE!'s Activist Institutes and workshops. INCITE! does not endorse particular strategies. We recognize that what works in one community may not work in another community, and that some of these strategies may not work in any community. The purpose of this document is to provide ideas and to spark the development of additional strategies that may help promote community accountability on the issue of violence against women of color. If you have additional ideas, principles, concerns, and/or strategies you would like to add to this working document, please contact us. We will continue to update this document as we get feedback.

Principles

- **Principle of Collective Action:** The reliance on the criminal justice system has taken power away from women's ability to organize collectively to stop violence and has invested this power within the state. The result is that women who seek redress in the criminal justice system feel disempowered and alienated. It has also promoted an individualistic approach toward ending violence such that the only way people think they can intervene in stopping violence is to call the police. This reliance has shifted our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence. Thus, community accountability strategies require collective action. If we ask the question, What can I do?, then the only answer will be to call the police. If we ask the question, what can we do? then we may be surprised at the number of strategies we can devise.
- **Principle of Prioritizing Safety for Survivors:** Many community accountability strategies have been developed under the model of "restorative justice." However, we are finding that such models often do not prioritize safety for survivors. They are often coerced to go along with mediation strategies in order to "keep the peace." In addition, the Aboriginal Women's Action Network reports that in Canada, "restorative justice" models have been used by white perpetrators to escape accountability for violence committed against Native women. They report that one man, Bishop Hubert O'Conner, was charged with multiple instances of sexual assault of aboriginal girls and boys. While found guilty, his punishment was to participate in a healing circle with his victims. They also complain that many of these models, are termed "indigenous" and hence Native

peoples must use them, even they may bear no resemblance to the forms of justice particular Native nations used at all. Any community accountability strategy will be ineffective if it relies on a romanticized notion of "community" that does not address the reality of sexism and homophobia within our communities. In addition, it is important to frame community accountability strategies as a question of whether or not a survivor should call the police if she is under attack. The question is not, should she call the police. The questions are, why is that her only option, and can we provide other options that will keep her truly safe.

- **Principle of Self-Determination:** Community accountability strategies will not work in all communities at all times. Each strategy must be evaluated within its community context and constantly be re-evaluated for its effectiveness and fairness.
- **Principle of Re-thinking and Building Community:** The term "community" is generally thought of in terms of geography. Given how mobile people are, particularly in large urban areas, it is not clear how there can be these strategies under these contexts. However, we can expand our notion of community to include communities based on religious affiliations, employment, hobbies, athletics, etc, and attempt to develop strategies based on those communities. For instance, one man was banished from a community for committing incest. However, he simply moved out of that area. But because he was a well-known academic, the family held him accountable in the academic community by following him around when he gave academic talks and exposing his history. In addition, in order to have community accountability, our work may also include building communities where they have been fractured so that they are in a position to hold its members accountable.
- **Principle of Exposing the Ineffectiveness of the Criminal Justice System to Address Gender Violence:** Because of the difficulties in developing community accountability strategies, many anti-violence advocates argue that relying on the criminal justice system is our only "alternative." It must be recognized, however, that the criminal justice system is itself not an alternative. It not only does not provide safety for women as an overall strategy (although may do so in individual cases), but actually puts women in greater danger of violence, particularly state violence (these issues are discussed in the INCITE!-Critical Resistance Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex). In the end, the only thing that will stop violence against women of color is when our communities no longer tolerate it. Developing these strategies are difficult because they entail addressing the root causes of oppression – racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic exploitation – but in the end, it is only through building communities of resistance and accountability that we can hope to stop violence against women of color.

Concerns/Questions to Ponder/Issues

- **How do we incorporate justice into community accountability strategies?** If we do not rely on the state to adjudicate cases of gender violence, then how do we ensure justice and fairness before holding perpetrators accountable? How do we ensure that we do not turn into vigilante groups? If we do develop processes do judge cases within a community context, will we just replicate a mini version of the oppressive state apparatus within our communities? Some models developed from addressing violence in LGBTI communities may be helpful as they report that they cannot assume that when someone calls saying they have been abused that this is necessarily true because they report that batterers also always call to save they have been abused. Therefore, they have developed tools for assessing what is really going on in the situation. One such model has been developed by the Northwest Network in Seattle. They have a whole list of questions to determine what is going on in the situation. It is important that there be a process so that batterers cannot manipulate a community accountability process against a survivor.
- **What are the boundaries of acceptable forms of community accountability?** For instance, is it okay to respond to perpetrators with physical violence? Would we even consider such acts violent? How do we determine which strategies are acceptable or not?
- Some strategies depend on banishing or ostracizing the perpetrator from the community. On one hand, it may help the person who has been victimized not to see that person. On the other hand, is this strategy simply the same as the prison system approach which also banishes people from community. **In addition, if the person leaves the community, will he just abuse people in another community, and will you lose your ability to hold him/her accountable?** There may be ways to keep the person in the community, without the person directly affected by him/her have to see that person. What is we presume there is no "outside" our community? Another approach that has been used is to keep the person there, but to sanction her/him, such as all members refusing to show her/him affection. It is also important that a community of accountability does not become a community that just enables the abuse. Such as sometimes perpetrators regularly "confess" their sins to the community, but then keeps on doing the same thing. Another related issue is making sure the person is stripped of her/his power position in that community. It also must be understood that any accountability strategy to get someone to change their behavior is likely to take years for it to actually change that person.

- **Some concerns have been raised about public shaming or outing.** For some groups, it has been effective. It has been reported that in using this approach in queer communities (and this may be true in other communities as well) that this approach actually escalates violence.
- **What language should we used to describe those who use violence and those who suffer from it?** Most of our language is derived from the criminal justice framework – victim/perpetrator. Is there other language that would be more suitable?

Community Accountability Strategies

- Notify employer of offender's domestic or sexual violence conviction or offense
- Pass flyers around community re: violence and connecting people to each other and resources.
- Conduct community meetings with batterers' accountability sessions.
- Work with core groups in religious institutions to hold perpetrator accountable
- Throw stones at offender's house; clang pots all night at his place, other such activities to disrupt his/her life.
- Violence prevention in schools
- Self-defense classes, including classes that teach "collective self-defense." That is, not just how you as an individual can fight back; but how can you work with other people to fight back and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Distribute a list of known rapists in community.
- Develop community watch groups with do direct action on issues of violence, confronting various issues with contribute to violence.
- Community needs assessment, participant action-oriented research with potluck sessions for stealth community building. These research projects could entail focus groups where women talk about their experiences of violence and how the system responds to them, as well as ask what community accountability strategies they think might work and provide safety for them.
- Do education with family members of survivor to enhance support for her/him.
- Identify what communities both the survivor and perpetrator belong to (geographic communities, career-oriented communities, religious communities, hobby-oriented communities, etc), to figure out where accountability strategies can be applied.
- Hold period community dialogues on violence to brainstorm ideas and develop community buy-in on developing accountability strategies.
- Family systems approach with community buy-in; harm reduction principles applied
- Develop a community alarm "signal" that signifies immediate crisis.

- Confront perpetrator with a group of people in a place where the perpetrator will be embarrassed (such as place of work, restaurant, etc). Principle of public shaming
- Develop an alternative peer court system to adjudicate issues of violence
- Boycott perpetrators' business or otherwise interfere with his/her financial situation.
- Utilize male allies to intervene with male perpetrators
- Ostracize perpetrator
- Develop a perpetrator database
- Use arts/media/cultural work to organize around violence
- Use street theater to demonstrate to community members how they could intervene if they see acts of violence or harassment
- Develop alternative guardianship system for children who are being abused that does not rely on the state.
- Identify high profile community leaders to take on this issue and support accountability strategies.
- Develop wallet cards re: your rights in terms of police and INS.
- Buy video cameras for community members to record police interactions
- Accountability session/target legislators to increase human services funding
- Community-based organizations survey community members
- Develop community dialogues/forums to discuss rudimentary causes of violence against women of color and linkages with state violence
- Use human rights framework in addressing violence against women of color; push human rights framework on legislators
- Distribute information (posters/brochures, bookmarks, etc) on group self-defense. That is, when most people think of intervening in a case of abuse or harassment, they think of intervening by themselves, and hence the only solution they can think of is to call the police. Instead, people need to think about how they can work with other folks in their community to intervene as a group. We thus need to disseminate ideas and suggestions for intervening for not just individual self-defense, but group self-defense.
- Use video/films/multi-media approaches to educate community.
- Not enough to just confront perpetrators; there must be follow-up.
- Develop sanctuary system for survivors.
- Use parenting classes as opportunities to integrate analysis re: violence.
- Nonviolence communication workshops
- All intervention programs should have anti-oppression analysis.
- Develop patrol system in neighborhood to watch out for harassment and abuse, including child abuse.

- Organize neighborhood watch groups to monitor not only strangers in the area, but what is going on in peoples' homes.
- Organize tenants' groups to proactively monitor for domestic violence.
- Develop alternative 911 and action squads that can intervene with both perpetrator and survivor.
- Train teens on what to look out for in choosing partners and dates
- Integrate anti-violence work throughout school curriculum
- Develop programs that combine social services with political organizing so that healing and action are not separated
- Review social service programs' effectiveness
- Review community accountability strategies for their effectiveness
- Develop alternative hotline for crisis intervention
- Develop women's centers for information and referrals
- Create list of allies who can intervene in cases of violence
- Develop campaign to integrate domestic/sexual violence curriculum in schools that comes fro anti-oppression analysis, and that build youth activism.
- Transform educational processes so that they emphasize the collective rather than individual
- Summer school programs for people of color that integrate anti-violence analysis
- Develop lists of community services, such as where you can do your laundry, grocery stores, and other such services. But integrate in this list, resources for dealing with violence to normalize the issue and take the shame out of it.
- Walk around carrying an axe to indicate you're prepared to defend yourself.
- Go to social gatherings, such as parties, family meetings, etc., and talk to people about what they can do to keep their families and communities safe.
- Develop roles of allies so that they just don't talk about how they feel bad about sexism and racism, but that they proactively organize to support women of color.
- Hold popular culture accountable for the images of violence that it perpetuates.
- To break down resistance to addressing gender violence, do political education that stresses how gender violence has served as a tool of racism and colonialism to destroy our communities. We cannot wait to address gender violence until after we address racism and genocide, because it has been through gender violence that racism and genocide has been successful. If we demonstrate that much gender violence is actually result of oppressive state policies, then we may be able to take some of the shame away from discussing these issues and encourage more people to see this issue as important to ensuring the survival of our communities. This approach may have the additional

impact of making us rethink who we define as “allies” in building a movement against violence against women of color.

- Hold someone accountable in a community by not ostracizing them, but by all the community members refusing to show affection to that person.
- Develop a two-fold strategy of 1) we are watching you – monitoring abusive behavior and 2) we are watching out for you – protecting people who might be victimized by violence.
- Develop a spiritual base to our work, where we build support and love in our communities, and are not just focused on confrontation.
- Create youth culture where violence is uncool.
- To ensure accountability within progressive movements around gender violence, begin to build power with other groups to diffuse power differentials and push for accountability.
- Develop a campaign around an issue that ties state violence to interpersonal violence. One such campaign is the American Indian Boarding School Healing Project, which calls for the U.S. to be accountable for boarding school abuses against Native children. It also frames the sexual violence currently in Native communities as the result of human rights violation caused by U.S. state policies around boarding schools. This framework takes out the shame of talking about sexual violence, and demonstrates the importance of addressing sexual/domestic violence in developing effective anti-racism, anti-colonial campaigns.
- Develop feminist health centers/community groups to provide immediate after care services to survivors of violence rather than just having to go to hospitals or the police.
- Develop community-based programs to provide sexual/domestic violence education for college orientation weeks rather than rely on institutional support.
- Circulate composite drawings of abusers in community.
- Talk about issue publicly among friends, families, and community members.
- Creative comprehensive programs that address violence within a framework that address all community needs. In India, we learned from one organization, Masum, that the way they were able to develop community accountability strategies (such as singing outside a perpetrators house until he stopped his abuse) without community backlash is that this group simultaneously provided needed community services such as micro credit, health care, education, etc. This group after many years became seen as a needed community institution, and thus had the power to intervene in cases of gender violence, where there interventions might otherwise be resisted. Thus, one possible model based on this idea would be the Community Healing and Action Center. The major components of the center would include:

- Intervention strategies such as hotline, referrals, response teams for perpetrators and survivors, sanctuary network; and group assessment of different tactics.
- Education, such as violence prevention curriculum, or a separate school, teach collective self-defense, multi-media education, parenting classes – and all education would have an organizing component
- Healing – Community – to include fun community building activities, provide essential community services, workshops on healing from historic and colonial trauma; conflict resolution, community garden, unlearning oppression, and community building.
- Healing – Victim – all healing strategies to be done on a collective level and stress social change component; support groups; strategies for integrating family into healing process
- Healing – Perpetrator – Collective healing with social change component; follow-through strategies to all confrontations
- Organizing – Campaigns against oppressive structures; outreach committee; making working against state violence a central campaign, grassroots fundraising activities; network with other social justice movements; leadership development

The first steps to building this center would be:

- Gather support for idea
- Identify at least three dedicated people to develop center
- Research similar existing programs
- Begin with one component and build from there

Models

Sisters Liberated Ground – Sista II Sista

Kick off – March 8. Spread the message on the street that violence against women is not tolerated

Components:

- Education: Flyers, Posters, Stickers, Street Outreach, Street Theater
- Hotline: Restrict hours hotline – when people need help dealing with a situation
- Workshops: Self/Defense, Machismo, Conflict resolution, Combating internalized Violence
- House visits: Build stronger relationships with women, support women to organize in their building
- Training: Train all members to deal with any given situation that arises from the hotline calls; Trainers will be people that had experience in the hotline business

Rationale:

- To help stop violence against women
- To create a violence-free zone
- Help women to be free
- We don't have to depend on the cops (who don't help us)
- We help ourselves collectively
- We build Sista power
- They have to take us seriously

Sista II Sista has already done a video project on girls who have been victimized by police brutality. They had an action at the police station, which was multi-media including performances, a dance contest, face painting for kids, and a community speak-out.

FAR Out (Friends Are Reaching Out) – The Northwest Networkof Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian, and Gay Survivors of Abuse

When people are abused, they become isolated. The domestic violence movement further isolates them, and they have to go to a shelter where they cannot tell their friends where they are. In addition, the d.v. movement does not work with the peoples who could most likely hold perpetrators accountable – their friends.

This model begins with beginning conversations with your friends to build connections on an ongoing relationship so that it is less likely for people to become isolated. Many times, when people begin a relationship, they put their friendships to the side. If you end up in an abusive relationship, you're more likely to get isolated, and then it becomes difficult to resume friendships. This project is based on getting friendship groups to make regular commitments to stay in contact with each other. In addition, these groups develop processes to talk openly about relationships. One way abuse continues, is that we tend to keep our sexual relationships private. By talking about them more openly, it is easier for friends to hold us accountable. Plus, if you know you're going to share your relationships dynamics openly, it is more likely that you will be accountable in the relationship.

One principle is the 0% – 1000% to 6. That is when something goes wrong in a relationship, we either take no responsibility, or complete responsibility. But they're the flip side of the same thing, because when we take complete responsibility, someone can point it wasn't all our fault, and then we say, it wasn't my fault at all, and take no responsibility. So this principle is about taking the approach of taking the accurate amount of responsibility for a situation.

In addition, this process requires negotiating what support looks like for each person before a crisis happens.

Perpetrators will listen to the people they love before they will listen to court mandated orders. This model was developed for queer people of color communities, but could be used for other communities as well. It is based on pre-existing friendship networks. Because calling the police and involving the system is generally not a workable solution for these communities, this model is about developing the capacity of the community to handle domestic violence.

The process starts by going to social events and talking to people about starting this FAR Out process, or spreading the news by word of mouth, or people calling the hotline.

Human Rights Zone – Youth Ministries in the Bronx

Designating a few blocks to be a police-free zone, or a human rights zone. Will not call the police on quality of life issues; drugs; or violence against women. They are using a popular education model to change views on the intersections of interpersonal and state violence. Fund out what people in community are willing to do and what they think, and using that as the base to change consciousness on these issues. Peoples' views don't match their experiences, so you look at these fissures to change opinions Do education, not through lectures, but is more interactive. Men talk to men and women talk to women. Will do a year of this house-to-house popular education before having a larger symposium.
Group has ready done a survey with 850 responses in which people said calling the police made things worse.

Components of human rights zone:

- Hotline – staffed by priest, community residents and young people where they would then mobilize community members to intervene in crises. When call police they have to arrest someone, and with the mandatory arrests, it is usually the women who are being abused who are getting arrested.
- Change tenant patrols so that they monitor communities for longer periods of the day and so they don't just look at things like graffiti, but look at issues of gender violence.
- Men's and women's support groups so they can talk about how to address these issues.

This zone has 65,000 residents, 15,000 young people, and 315 office.
Also want to have a "Know Your Police Officer" book that has pictures, names, and badge numbers so you can identify a cop if he abuses you.
Project began with issue of police brutality, and then has incorporated analysis of gender violence.

CARA in Seattle

This model developed around trying to get the organization to hold a perpetrator accountable. First, the survivor worked with a supportive organization to develop strategies to address the situation. Then, she developed a collective of allies within the

organization, including male allies. These male allies confronted the perpetrator with the demand that he resign his position of powers, leave the organization, and seek counseling. These allies then follow his progress. The idea was not so much ostracism, but for him to not be in positions of power within progressive groups.

CARA sponsored a prison abolition film festival. In Seattle, the police do warrants on everyone in the home if there is a domestic violence charge. Then anyone with an outstanding warrant is arrested. Many undocumented people have been reported to INS during domestic violence charges.

MST – Movement of Landless Peoples in Brazil

This movement does not stress armed resistance, but does utilize other forms of physical resistance. Landless peoples claim territory that is owned privately, but is not being used. They set up tents and fences and defend the land, which is called an occupation. If they manage to get ownership of land (actually, they do not own land per se, but they can win the right to produce on that land and occupy it), then they form a settlement, in which they build houses and more permanent structures. 300,000 families have been involved in occupations over the past 20 years. Families rather than individuals take part in this resistance. About 20 families form a nucleus, which is coordinated by one man and one woman. The nuclei are then organized into the following sectors: 1) production/cooperation/employment; 2) education/trading; 3) education; 4) gender; 5) communication; 6) human rights; 7) health; 8) culture.

Those in the gender sector are mixed gender. They ensure women are in all decision-making positions, and are equally represented in public life. They look at who does childcare, who cleans, etc. The education is called “itinerant” education, because if they have to move quickly, they continue to do education while on the move. Security teams are mixed gender. The gender team trains security to deal with domestic violence. Popular education theater is also used regularly.

All issues are discussed communally. As time progresses, there is less domestic violence because everything is so communal and transparent. In addition, because women have these physical roles, such as being involved in security, women become seen less as easy targets for violence, and they also think of themselves differently.

In addition, sectors and leadership rotate so that there is less of a fixed, hierarchical leadership Hierarchical leadership tends to promote power differentials and hence abuse. This model helps prevent that from happening. If abuse does happen on a repeated basis, perpetrators have been asked to leave the community.

Now, what is being developed is a similar movement in urban areas, which is a movement of unemployed workers, who take over property and land in urban areas, with a demand for permanent lands in the suburbs.

Community Accountability

Community Accountability Within People of Color Progressive Movements

Community Accountability Working Document

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